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THE BLESS-
ED DAMOZEL
MY SISTER'S
SLEEP ETC.
BY DANTE
GABRIEL
ROSSETTI

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Fourth Thousand.

◊ ◊ THE ◊ ◊
BLESSED
DAMOZEL



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THE BLESSÉD DAMOZEL



I

THE blessed Damozel leaned
out

From the gold bar of Heaven :
Her blue grave eyes were deeper
much

Than a deep water, even.
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were
seven.

II

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to
hem,

No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift
On the neck meetly worn ;
And her hair, lying down her back,
Was yellow like ripe corn.

I

III

Herseemed she scarce had been
a day

One of God's choristers ;
The wonder was not yet quite
gone

From that still look of hers ;
Albeit to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.

IV

(To *one* it is ten years of years
. . . Yet now, here in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me,—her
hair

Fell all about my face . . .
Nothing: the Autumn-fall of
leaves.

The whole year sets apace.)

V

It was the terrace of God's house
That she was standing on,—
By God built over the sheer depth
In which Space is begun ;
So high, that looking downward
thence,

She could scarce see the sun.

VI

It lies from Heaven across the
flood

Of ether, as a bridge.

Beneath, the tides of day and
night

With flame and blackness ridge
The void, as low as where this
earth

Spins like a fretful midge.

VII

But in those tracts, with her, it
was

The peace of utter light
And silence. For no breeze may
stir

Along the steady flight
Of seraphim; no echo there,
Beyond all depth or height.

VIII

Heard hardly, some of her new
friends,

Playing at holy games,
Spake, gentle-mouthed, among
themselves,

Their virginal chaste names;
And the souls, mounting up to God,
Went by her like thin flames.

IX

And still she bowed herself, and
stooped
Into the vast waste calm;
Till her bosom's pressure must
have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.

X

From the fixt lull of heaven, she
saw
Time, like a pulse, shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her
gaze still strove,
In that steep gulph, to pierce
The swarm : and then she spake,
as when
The stars sang in their spheres.

XI

"I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come," she said.
"Have I not prayed in solemn
heaven?
On earth, has he not prayed?
Are not two prayers a perfect
strength?
And shall I feel afraid?"

XII

"When round his head the
aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I'll take his hand, and go with him
To the deep wells of light,
And we will step down as to a
stream
And bathe there in God's sight.

XIII

"We two will stand beside that
shrine,
Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps tremble continually
With prayer sent up to God;
And where each need, revealed,
expects
Its patient period.

XIV

"We two will lie i' the shadow of
That living mystic tree,
Within whose secret growth the
Dove
Sometimes is felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes
touch
Saith His name audibly.

XV

“ And I myself will teach to him—
I myself, lying so—
The songs I sing here; which
his mouth
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,
Finding some knowledge at each
pause
And some new thing to know.”

XVI

(Alas! to *her* wise simple mind
These things were all but
known
Before: they trembled on her
sense,—
Her voice had caught their tone.
Alas for lonely Heaven! Alas
For life wrung out alone!

XVII

Alas, and though the end were
reached? . . .
Was *thy* part understood
Or borne in trust? And for her
sake
Shall this too be found good?—
May the close lips that knew not
prayer
Praise ever, though they would?)

XVIII

"We two," she said, "will seek
the groves

Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens,
whose names

Are five sweet symphonies:—
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret, and Rosalys.

XIX

"Circle-wise sit they, with bound
locks

And bosoms coveréd;
Into the fine cloths, white like
flame,

Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robes for
them

Who are just born, being dead.

XX

"He shall fear haply, and be dumb.

Then I will lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abashed or weak:
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak.

XXI

"Herself shall bring us, hand in
hand,
To Him round whom all souls
Kneel—the unnumber'd solemn
heads
Bowed with their aureoles :
And Angels, meeting us, shall
sing
To their citherns and citoles.

XXII

"There will I ask of Christ the
Lord
Thus much for him and me :—
To have more blessing than on
earth
In nowise ; but to be
As then we were,—being as then
At peace. Yea, verily.

XXIII

"Yea, verily ; when he is come
We will do thus and thus :
Till this my vigil seem quite
strange
And almost fabulous ;
We two will live at once, one life ;
And peace shall be with us."

XXIV

She gazed, and listened, and then
said,

Less sad of speech than mild :
"All this is when he comes,"

She ceased ;

The light thrilled past her, filled
With Angels, in strong level lapse.

Her eyes prayed, and she
smiled.

XXV

(I saw her smile.) But soon
their flight

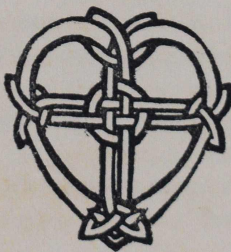
Was vague 'mid the poised
spheres.

And then she cast her arms along

The golden barriers,

And laid her face between her
hands,

And wept. (I heard her tears.)



MY SISTER'S SLEEP.

I

She fell asleep on Christmas Eve,
Upon her eyes' most patient
calms
The lids were shut ; her uplaid
arms
Covered her bosom, I believe.

II

Our mother, who had leaned all
day
Over the bed from chime to
chime,
Then raised herself for the
first time,
And as she sat her down, did
pray.

III

Her little work-table was spread
With work to finish. For the
glare
Made by her candle, she had
care
To work some distance from the
bed.

IV

Without, there was a good moon
up,
Which left its shadows far
within ;
The depth of light that it was
in
Seemed hollow like an altar-cup.

V

Through the small room, with
subtle sound
Of flame, by vents the fire-
shine drove
And reddened. In its dim
alcove
The mirror shed a clearness
round.

VI

I had been sitting up some
nights,
And my tir'd mind felt weak
and blank ;
Like a sharp strengthening
wine, it drank
The stillness and the broken
lights.

VII

Silence was speaking at my side
With an exceedingly clear
voice :

I knew the calm as of a choice
Made in God for me, to abide.

VIII

I said, "Full knowledge does
not grieve :

This which upon my spirit
dwells

Perhaps would have been
sorrow else :

But I am glad 'tis Christmas
Eve."

IX

Twelve struck. That sound,
which all the years

Hear in each hour, crept off ;
and then

The ruffled silence spread
again,

Like water that a pebble stirs.

X

Our mother rose from where
she sat.

Her needles, as she laid them
down,

Met lightly, and her silken
gown

Settled: no other noise than
that.

XI

"Glory unto the Newly Born!"

So, as said angels, she did
say;

Because we were in Christmas-
day,

Though it would still be long
till dawn.

XII

She stood a moment with her
hands

Kept in each other, praying
much;

A moment that the soul may
touch

But the heart only understands.

XIII

Almost unwittingly, my mind
Repeated her words after
her ;
Perhaps tho' my lips did not
stir ;
It was scarce thought, or cause
assign'd.

XIV

Just then in the room over us
There was a pushing back of
chairs,
As some who had sat unawares
So late, now heard the hour,
and rose.

XV

Anxious, with softly stepping
haste,
Our mother went where Mar-
garet lay,
Fearing the sounds o'erhead
—should they
Have broken her long-watched
for rest !

XVI

She stooped an instant, calm,
and turned ;
But suddenly turned back
again ;
And all her features seemed
in pain
With woe, and her eyes gazed
and yearned.

XVII

For my part, I but hid my face,
And held my breath, and
spake no word :
There was none spoken ; but
I *heard*
The silence for a little space.

XVIII

Our mother bowed herself and
wept.
And both my arms fell, and I
said :
“ God knows I knew that she
was dead.”
And there, all white, my sister
slept.

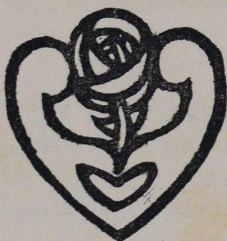
XIX

Then kneeling, upon Christmas
morn

A little after twelve o'clock

We said, ere the first quarter
struck,

"Christ's blessing on the newly
born!"



FROM THE CLIFFS: NOON

I

The sea is in its listless chime:
Time's lapse it is, made audible,—
The murmur of the earth's large
shell.

In a sad blueness beyond rhyme
It ends : sense, without thought,
can pass

No stadium further. Since time
was,

This sound hath told the lapse
of time.

II

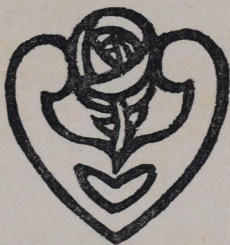
No stagnance that death wins,
—it hath

The mournfulness of ancient
life,

Always enduring at dull Strife.
As the world's heart of rest and
wrath,

Its painful pulse is in the
sands.

Last utterly, the whole sky
stands,
Grey and not known, along its
path.



PAX VOBIS

I

'Tis of the Father Hilary.
He strove, but could not pray :
 so took
The darkened stair, where his
 feet shook
A sad blind echo. He kept up
Slowly. 'Twas a chill sway of
 air
That autumn noon within the
 stair,
Sick, dizzy, like a turning cup.
His brain perplexed him, void
 and thin :
He shut his eyes and felt it
 spin ;
The obscure deafness hemmed
 him in.
He said : "The air is calm out-
 side."

II

He leaned unto the gallery
Where the chime keeps the
 night and day :

It hurt his brain,—he could not
pray.

He had his face upon the stone :
Deep 'twixt the narrow shafts,
his eye

Passed all the roofs unto the
sky

Whose greyness the wind swept
alone.

Close by his feet he saw it shake
With wind in pools that the
rains make :

The ripple set his eyes to ache.
He said, "Calm hath its peace
outside."

III

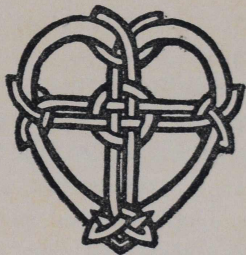
He stood within the mystery
Girding God's blessed Eucharist :
The organ and the chaunt had
ceased :

A few words paused against his
ear,

Said from the altar : drawn round
him,

The silence was at rest and dim.
He could not pray. The Bell
shook clear

And ceased. All was great awe,
—the breath
Of God in man, that warranteth
Wholly the inner things of Faith.
He said: "There is the world
outside."



NOTE

The Poems which go to make up this, the second of the *Roses of Parnassus*, were written by Rossetti when a youth, and first published in *The Germ*, in 1850. They were afterwards subjected to careful revision in many minor details before they reappeared in the still copyright Edition of his *Poems*, published in 1881. The reprint in this volume, therefore, is from the original version of the poems, and for this reason has a value all its own, apart from any interest one may feel in the critical question whether the original or the later version is to be preferred. Any one wishing to compare the variations should note that *Pax Vobis* was afterwards reprinted as *World's Worth* and *From the Cliffs: Noon*, as *Sea Limits*. The titles of *The Blessed Damozel*, and *My Sister's Sleep*, remain unchanged.

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In Preparation

III. THE WHITE ROSE AN-
THOLOGY:

THE ODES OF JOHN
KEATS: THE RED ROSE
ANTHOLOGY: THE SENSI-
TIVE PLANT, BY PERCY
BYSSHE SHELLEY: THE
YELLOW ROSE AN-
THOLOGY

B. A.

